

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**  
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**In support of Senate Bill 3 *An Act Combatting Sexual Harassment***  
***and Sexual Assault***  
**April 1, 2019**

Good afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of Senate Bill 3 *An Act Combatting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 60,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 16 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services and education, to make positive sexual and reproductive health decisions.

As the nation's largest provider of sex education, Planned Parenthood provides education, information, and resources about consent and healthy relationships. Planned Parenthood believes and stands with all survivors of sexual assault by respecting their decision to share or not share their experiences; by offering vital sexual and reproductive health care in a safe and nonjudgmental environment; and by supporting better policies to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence. That is why we are in strong support of Senate Bill 3.

Sexual harassment in any workplace is unacceptable. For too long, women have had to suffer the emotional, mental, and physical harm that comes from workplace sexual harassment; women have been denied career advancement opportunities, been subject to discrimination and humiliation, and forced to endure dangerous work environments. Every worker deserves to feel safe, secure and supported while on the job. This legislation uses prevention and fair and empowering responses to protect victims of sexual harassment. It also protects workers and ensures they have a safe and confidential opportunity to report, have a hearing and retain their jobs.

Anyone can be a victim of sexual violence — no matter their gender, sexual orientation, or age. Women, especially women of color, LGBTQ identified people, and people with developmental disabilities are more likely to experience sexual assault over the course of their lifetimes and also experience increased amounts of discrimination and bias when they do report. Sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence which is a crime rooted in a history of inequality and pervasive secrecy.

Employers, including public sector institutions, must guarantee a workplace free from sexual harassment and violence where people are held accountable for their behavior. As more institutions are holding abusers accountable, the Trump-Pence administration has rolled back essential Title IX guidance and weakened protections for survivors of sexual assault on campus, increased protections for those accused of sexual assault, and lessened the responsibilities that schools have to protect their students. This move reflected a stunning disregard for survivors of sexual assault. And we all watched as survivors spoke out last year and joined others in the #MeToo movement to urge the United States Senate to reject the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to U.S. Supreme Court. Confirming Brett Kavanaugh sent a message that sexual violence is rewarded with power and that voices of survivors of sexual violence did not matter or were not believed. High profile cases like this one and millions of #MeToo accounts of sexual assault have illustrated the ability of individuals to escape or nearly escape prosecution because the statute of limitations has passed.

At just five years, Connecticut has one of the shortest reporting windows in the country and the shortest among the surrounding states. 25 states have no statute of limitations and 19 states have a longer statute of limitations than Connecticut. Many victims and survivors need time to process what happened, heal and gather the strength to report the crime. In Connecticut, the window is often closed before many victims come to terms with what happened.

As policy makers you hold responsibility to and power to change the culture of misogyny and sexism that is pervasive in all institutions in our state which makes it more difficult for victims to come forward and share their experiences of sexual harassment or sexual violence publicly. Just last year, more than one in five respondents to an anonymous

survey to staffers, legislators, lobbyists and others who work at the state Capitol about sexual harassment said they have experienced unwanted sexual contact, uncomfortable visits or phone calls, sexually provocative jokes and stories and other forms of inappropriate workplace behavior while working at the state Capitol.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England believes that each woman should have full autonomy over her own body and her own life—both in access to health care and in the ability to live and work in safe communities free of violence and fear. To make real progress toward ending sexual assault, survivors need policies that support them which is why we urge the committee and the legislature to pass Senate Bill 3 *An Act Combatting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault*. This legislation allows for victims to heal, to find some strength and to move forward knowing the person who harmed them can be held accountable. Planned Parenthood will never stop fighting for survivors of sexual violence, for women, for those most impacted by systemic oppression—we will never stop fighting for justice and we will continue to work with our supporters to build the world we want to see—one where everyone has the freedom to control their own bodies and their own futures.